

Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D. C. 20505

China's "America-Bashing" Policy [REDACTED]

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China often engages in sharp, public criticism of US foreign policy in areas that are of little strategic concern to China and where Beijing has few assets other than propaganda support, little influence, and no specific goals. "America-bashing" involves Chinese public statements which conflict in tone, and occasionally in substance, with private comments:

- US policy in Central America, southern Africa, the Middle East, and on terrorism are primary targets of Chinese America-bashing.

America-bashing is not intended to influence US policy; instead, it appears designed to show solidarity and curry favor with the Third World. Deng Xiaoping stressed this in a meeting with several US Senators in September 1983, when he argued that China's "objective analysis" of Latin American problems "had nothing to do" with the relations between "our two countries":

- The level of criticism seems to mirror whatever issue is popular in the Third World, and does not directly reflect the importance of the issue to China.
- Beijing's America-bashing appears event-driven and does not reflect some grand Chinese initiative in a region.
- Despite claims of Third World leadership, China is happy to let others take the lead on Third World political issues, preferring to follow the consensus once it has formed. Beijing tends to publicly endorse any political proposals having the full support of Third World regional blocs.

Beijing has a preference for surrogate criticism, often quoting others' disapproval of US foreign policy--including US media reproaches--instead of commenting on the subject itself. This may be a result of past US protests:

- The sensitivity of the issue to Washington does not seem to moderate Chinese behavior, however. When commenting on the recent buildup of the US presence in the Mediterranean, for example, People's Daily entitled its article "Desire to See the World Plunged Into Chaos."

We believe Beijing finds criticism of Washington on these issues an effective political substitute for material support of the Third World and a useful means to lend credibility to China's claim of being an independent power in world affairs and a leader of the Third World:

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- It also increases China's room for maneuver within the strategic triangle and makes it easier for Beijing to court Moscow's East European allies by providing common ground.
- Ironically, it may increase China's ability to do more with the United States as well. Beijing's Assistant Military Attache in Washington argued this position in July 1986, saying that it was better to publicly criticize both superpowers and "quietly develop close relations with the United States."

China's responsiveness to US demarches on America-bashing has been disappointing and we doubt that Beijing will be very responsive to future US requests to tone down its criticism. We would not be surprised to see an increase in Chinese criticism as Beijing's relations with the United States grow. China may balance increased US-China cooperation with more public criticism to improve its Third World credentials:

- As the US role in China's military and economic modernization grows, however, Beijing may become more attentive to warnings--especially if delivered by Congressional and business leaders and individuals outside of government who are perceived in Beijing as friends.
- In the past, Beijing has been most attentive to arguments that America-bashing undermines Administration efforts to convince Congress and the American people that China is a friend of the United States that deserves special consideration on COCOM-controlled technology transfers and trade protectionist legislation when delivered by such people.

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